

Ben Leney

Salvation's Plan

Stilling the storm Questions

1. Why was Jesus sleeping?
2. What does this show about Him?
3. What made the disciples afraid?
4. How does this apply to our experience?

The stilling of the storm, that we are about to read, is the first of four miracles that shows his comprehensive authority over all forces that are hostile to the kingdom, including over defilement - contact with graves, blood or a corpse created ritual uncleanness. If the disciples, or the crowds, or indeed the readers of Mark's gospel (persecuted Christians quite probably in Rome) were doubting Jesus' power, this section, up to the end of chapter 5 (although if you went to the end of chapter 7 you get feeding of the 5 thousand and Jesus walking on water thrown in, so I quite like going that far), should sort you out.

Mark 4:35-6 "On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him."

The stilling of the storm happens in Matthew 8 and Luke 8 but there is no reference to it being evening there. This phrase 'On that day' is repeated 10 times in Mark, and four of those include 'evening'. In Mark's context it's been a long day - it's an evening occasion. There is no suggestion in Mark 5:1 that it's evening, but there could have been a time lapse here. Not every event in Mark happens as breathlessly as it appears! We are to understand that all Mark reports in chapter 4 represents a single day's teaching on the shore. This is important in a moment.

Where are they going from and to? We can see that it's across the TOP of the Sea of Galilee, which is 7 miles wide at its widest point. Perhaps 2 hours' journey under normal conditions.

We can see 'let us cross over'. Jesus knows what he wants to do, doesn't share it with his disciples, gives the instruction and they follow. There's something for us to gain - if Jesus says something, let's just do it. If Jesus doesn't say something and we do it, are we hearing him?

Perhaps Jesus wanted a little bit of time away from the crowds, on the sea. So he leaves the multitudes. He doesn't go back to Capernaum - they're doing quite a long trip. (7 miles) So this is Jesus completely relying on the Father here, he goes just as he is. 'Other little boats were also with him' is a nice detail that doesn't pop up in

Matthew or Luke and no further reference to them. It gives us a vivid picture of many people desperate to follow Jesus - they have a boat, they follow him.

Mark 4:37-38 "And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?""

This gives us a picture of quite a serious tempest - the wind that is whipping the waves up to tremendous heights, and this boat - not a tiny boat, a fisherman's boat, a working boat - and the boat is filling, it's getting swamped with water and is going to sink. For these veteran sailors to react as they did, this must have been an extraordinarily severe storm.

"The geographic location of the Sea of Galilee is such that sudden violent storms are not unusual. While crossing this very sea one summer afternoon, I asked an Israeli tour guide if he had ever been in such a storm. "I certainly have!" he replied, throwing up his hands and shaking his head. "And I never want to be in one like it again!" Wiersbe, W.W. (1996) *The Bible exposition commentary*.

Just to pause for a moment - we will all have differing experiences with regards to storms and raging seas. I love how it's put here:

| The New International Version (Psalm 93)

| Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea
| —the LORD on high is mighty.

Also here

Ps 145:3 "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable."

Perhaps it's the power of the sea that shows God's power more than anything else we regularly see.

"An open fishing boat with low sides such as that discovered in 1986 in Ginosar would be vulnerable to high waves: indicates that it was being filled to the point that it was in imminent danger of sinking." R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC

Jesus may be asleep due to physical exhaustion. He has been giving lots of teaching to thousands of people. He's done it in the Spirit, but he's tired. Some would suggest Jesus has fallen asleep to test the faith of the disciples. Or that he is completely trusting the Father so does not fear.

This does make us think of

Jonah 1:6 "So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.""

Why was Jonah sleeping so peacefully? Because of his relationship with God. He tells the captain to throw him overboard - he's not as scared of the sea as he is in

fear of his God. And both in this story and in the stilling of the storm, it's the sleeper, awakened, who rescues the situation.

'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' The disciples didn't understand the parables, but we start to see the confusion, the waywardness, the doubt that the disciples had.

"The tension in this event is between Jesus and his own followers. Their fear of death and his undisturbed sleep generate the conflict. Jesus slept unconcerned, while they bailed furiously in fear of their lives." Kernaghan, R.J. (2007) *Mark*.

Who is this Jesus? They call him 'teacher' - recognising his authority. 'Do you not care?' This is quite harsh, to Jesus. Here is the Son of God come to earth to give his life as a ransom for many, and his disciples say 'Don't you care?' 1 Pet 5:7 - he cares for you.

'Perishing' in this context means physical death - we're going to die here. They don't seem so concerned that Jesus will die, but for them. This is a life and death situation. Apart from Jesus' crucifixion it's perhaps the only point in the gospels in which it's clear the disciples could die.

Or IS it clear?

"If Jesus' ministry is indeed intimately connected with the coming kingdom of God, if Jesus is the Holy One of God identified as such publicly by demons in the presence of the first disciples (1:24), if he is Lord of the Sabbath (2:28) and if he is stronger than Satan (3:23-27), then he will not drown in a boat trip that he himself has suggested (v. 35). The disciples should have known that they would survive the storm on this occasion." Schnabel, E.J. (2017) *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*.

Mark 4:39 "Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm."

He arose. Jesus (God) arose. Just imagine this for a moment. There were the disciples, concerned, but they've woken him up at last, maybe they've had to shout something at him. I can imagine the disciples' panic dissipating even as Jesus gets up from the floor of the boat and takes control. Even as he starts to act, the disciples' panic evaporates. They've seen him in action. They know what he can do. They don't know what he'll do in this situation, but they know he's capable.

They've seen natural miracles from Jesus before. In Luke 5:4-5 which occurs probably before even Mark 1:16 Peter and the other fishermen were given a miraculous catch of fish by Jesus. What was Peter's response?

Luke 5:8 "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

If God is getting up, if God is gearing up for action, we do not need to be afraid. When we see God moving our hearts are filled with hope at what he is going to do. This is one way God deals with our fear.

Notice that Jesus makes no prayer to God or adjuration in God's name. He rebukes the wind, he tells off the wind - Jesus as Creator made the wind, created the sea.

Nahum 1:4 "He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry."

Amos 4:13 "For behold, He who forms mountains, And creates the wind"

This is a tiny sea. If Jesus was on the Pacific Ocean and there was a hurricane and tsunami, He could just as easily have calmed that sea.

It's the same God, the same Jesus, we ask and we will receive. He rebukes the wind and tells the waves to be still. Instantly there is a calm. What a deliverer! He's delivered his disciples from death, in the nick of time, certainly as far as they are concerned.

"There does not seem to be a surviving account from the Greco-Roman world (no matter how legendary) of a human figure using his or her own native powers to still a storm." Nolland, J. (2005) *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*.

This is a powerful formative moment for the disciples. Presumably when they woke Jesus up they were hoping for some sort of saving action, but the sheer scale of this has overwhelmed them.

Mark 4:40-41 "But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!""

This is the start of a number of charges that Jesus brings that sound quite harsh to his disciples. In this context it would have been natural to be scared. They are to learn a lesson from this. We are called to learn lesson and remember them.

He is critical of the disciples because they do not know who God is. They do not know their God.

1 Cor 10:11 "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

If we must be fearful, fear God. Not fearful of natural disasters, or of anything that will take our natural life from us. This was challenging in that moment for the disciples.

"Their fear of the storm overwhelmed their commitment to Jesus and their confidence that he did care for them." Word Biblical Commentary 34a Mark 1-8:6, Guelich, p. 268

What sort of faith are they required to have?

It's "faith in God's saving power as it is present and active in the person of Jesus." EBC Revised Ed. Vol 9, Wessel and Strauss, p.766

Tim Keller, the minister, evangelist, writer - who went to glory only very recently at the age of 73 from pancreatic cancer. 'If Jesus rose from the dead, we do not need

to be fearful of anything.’ Death does not have the last word. Keller died a good death, he said: ‘There’s no downside for me, leaving. Not in the slightest.’

When he got his cancer diagnosis: ‘It’s endlessly comforting to have a God infinitely more loving and wise than I am.’

The disciples are criticised here for not having faith, and for being fearful. In the gospel of Mark, fear is the opposite of faith. See this for example:

Mark 5:36 “Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.””

“That’s Mark’s invitation to all of us: OK, go on, wake Jesus up, pray to him in your fear and anger. And don’t be surprised when he turns to you, as the storm subsides in the background, and asks when you’re going to get some real faith.” Wright, T. (2004) *Mark for Everyone*.

Mark 4:41 “And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!””

We have two references to fear - one is cowardly fear, in v.40 and then one is fear of God, in v.41. It’s a deep criticism in Mark’s account of the disciples.

“There is a great deal of discipleship failure in these chapters. The disciples have much to learn and one suspects that Mark wants his readers to identify with the difficulty as a way of gaining strength from the fact that these apostles did overcome their past failures.” Turner, D. and Bock, D.L. (2005) *Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark*.

I’ve found agreement in both Spurgeon and others that although their situation is terrible, their lack of faith is actually more terrible! In Matthew, even before Jesus rebukes the storm, he rebukes the disciples. I think we see the greater realism in Mark, maybe to emphasize the horror of the storm. Normally in a dire situation, the best thing to do is to help the person first, and THEN tell them off if they had made a mistake that led to their error. Jesus always makes the right call. Even though their faith is small, Jesus still helps them.

One of the emphases in Mark is to show us how ill-prepared and unlikely they are as leaders. But after the Holy Spirit is poured out they become incredible leaders in the early church.

Jesus reproaches them for this psychological fear for their lack of faith.

The reality is that with mental health issues, it’s not understanding that troubles us, but a sickness, a distortion, a fixation, an unhelpful inability to reason fairly from experience.

The disciples are a scared bunch.

We get fearful too, don’t we? And fear is a disaster for faith, even though God sometimes overrides it for us. We fear disapproval, rejection, failure,

meaninglessness, illness and death, including losing those we love and also losing communities that we cherish. I have been more aware while studying this of my own fear in this regard - we don't always recognise fear for what it is. I thought Ron Kernaghan's comment is helpful:

"The tension between faith and fear may be with us for most of our lives. Whenever we take a risk for the gospel, we may also find something to fear. Our responsibility is neither to shy away from fear nor to make ourselves numb to it. Our challenge is to act in faith even when we are afraid. That is a challenge we cannot meet alone." Kernaghan, R.J. (2007) *Mark*.

The phobos fear, Mark 4:41 I like to think is a right fear of who Jesus is. The wind and sea obey him - they listen to him. It's the same word as 'he who has ears to hear' - to take heed, as we heard from Chris Scutt. We know the demons obey Jesus, and we see hear the sea obey him. He carries divine power.

"Control of the elements is even more extraordinary and inexplicable than the restoration of suffering human beings - in the OT is a frequently noted attribute of God. Ps 107:23-32 must have been in Mark's mind as he narrated the story." R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC, p.221

"In an interesting twist, 2 Maccabees 9:8 tells a story about the evil king Antiochus Epiphanes trying to calm a storm and failing. When he died, it was in part God's retribution for his trying to do something that only God had the right to do." Turner, D. and Bock, D.L. (2005) *Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark*.

Gerasene Demoniac Questions

1. How does this incident link to the previous one?
2. What sort of life had this man had?
3. How might the disciples have been feeling at this point?
4. How does the demon's speech compare with other demons in Mark so far?

Mark 5:1 "Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes."

A seven mile trip across the sea, no small trip. The country of the Gadarenes, the different gospel writers refer to slightly different locations - it's a Gentile region. We know this as Jews would not keep pigs.

"This passage is also transitional as Jesus is depicted as crossing over into foreign, indeed pagan territory—a land where pig herding is acceptable and demons mass in legions." Witherington, B., III (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary*.

I wonder if the storm is linked to this transition to Gentile territory.

Mark 5:2 "And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,"

Our old friend 'immediately' here. There is a bit of confusion in this account, as the man comes up to him here, but then in Mark 5:6 he saw him from afar and rushed up. This man is deranged. Maybe he rushed up and saw him, then went and wandered off, and came back to him.

It's told better in Luke and Matthew in terms of sequencing.

It suggests he's simply demon-possessed at this point. We know what Jesus can do. Do demons actually exist? I've got a long quote for you here:

"Some therapeutic situations are best explained by the work of a spirit being. While it is true that symptoms produced by schizophrenia, dissociation, and other psychological and chemical disorders have often been wrongly attributed to demons, some conditions are best explained by the direct influence of a spirit entity. The international community of mental health professionals recognizes this and labels it "Trance and Possession Disorder," an especially common diagnosis in non-Western cultures." Arnold, C.E. (2007) "Can We Still Believe in Demons Today?," in Cabal, T. et al. (eds.) *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*.

Mark 5:3 "who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains,"

'dwelling' means that he lived there. We get a bit more insight in the Luke account:

Luke 8:29 "For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness."

It became clear this man was unsafe to be around; he escaped through the supernatural power of the demons. Tore the shackles. This is not strongman power. This is supernatural power. You can imagine people fleeing from him, and not getting anywhere near him.

Witherington comments that this is:

"the most graphic of all the exorcisms, indeed, in many regards the most graphic of all the miracle tales, and in some ways the most disturbing as well." Witherington, B., III (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. p.178

Jesus has just rebuked the sea, and now he's encountering a very dangerous individual. We have already looked at the man in the synagogue with a demon - that was an exorcism on sacred soil in sacred space. But now we're about to see an exorcism in an unclean land in an unclean place. This has a very different feel to it.

'No one could bind him' - the only person we might compare to him is Samson, who had divine strength.

He lives among the tombs - this is a defilement. He is overturning the ceremonial laws, whether about the Sabbath, or about cleansing. This man is defiled so any contact with him will risk defilement.

Mark 5:4 "because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him."

This reinforces and backs up what we read from Luke - maybe he'd been in prison more than once. The shackles would be the iron hoops going round arms and legs, so you can only shuffle, and can't move your arms to damage others.

The word 'tame' would normally have been used to subdue wild animals. No one can do anything with him, a hopeless case. The demons are keeping him alive to damage him but also others, as much damage and terror to others.

"No one was strong enough to subdue him. The description reminds one of the strong man who was overcome by someone even stronger in 3:27. This man needed such a confrontation." Turner, D. and Bock, D.L. (2005) *Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark*.

Mark 5:5 "And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones."

Here we see the extent of this man's predicament. This is the longest account. In Matthew there are two possessed by demons (possibly the man in the synagogue at Capernaum, who doesn't appear in that gospel). In Luke there is only one as well.

The Matthew account has a rather different impact on the reader:

"In sharp contrast to Mark, the two demoniacs here do not attract reader sympathy; rather, they are presented as being a public menace, making that area unpassable." Nolland, J. (2005) *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*.

The fact he's in the mountains and tombs, shows his uncleanness and isolation. He's crying out in distress and cutting himself - a mental health issue. His demon is damaging him.

"The picture of the miserable man is fearful; and in drawing it, each evangelist has some touches which are peculiarly his own; but St. Mark's is the most eminently graphic of all, adding, as it does, many strokes which wonderfully heighten the terribleness of the man's condition, and also magnify the glory of his cure" (Trench, "Miracles").¹¹ Vincent, M.R. (1887) *Word studies in the New Testament*.

Mark 5:6-7 "When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.""

He ran and worshipped him - to come towards, to kiss. In James it says even the demons believe in God and tremble. They aren't like the fools who don't believe in God. He kneels down before Jesus. This is the further illustration of who Jesus truly is. v.41 'who can this be?' They don't know, but this demon-possessed man does.

"It is interesting how often in the gospels the demons themselves take the initiative and react violently to the very presence of Jesus, even before he says a word of

rebuke or exorcism." Cole, R.A. (1989) *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*.

The verb 'to worship' is a sign of respect, sometimes it means bowing before a superior. Note that the NIV translates it as 'fell on his knees'. It's submission rather than intentional worship.

The word 'to worship' is used about 60 times in the NT but only appears twice in Mark - here where it's a demon-possessed man, and also here:

Mark 15:19 "Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him."

Then we have this most explicit description of Jesus - son of the most High God. Another demon clearly declaring who Jesus is. 'Do not torment me!' he says.

His comment 'what have I to do with you' is hard to translate:

"Some hostility is expressed and seems to connote "What do we have to do with each other?" or "Why do you interfere with me?" (cf. John 2:4), with the possible implication of a threat—"Mind your own business" Witherington, B., III (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. p.181

This demonstrates the obedience - he has control over them. 'I implore you' means I charge you, I beg you, I plead with you in the strongest terms I possibly can. The demon is fearful but can't run off and escape. He knows Jesus has the authority over him.

"Satan dreads the doom which awaits him.

Conscience is feared by them.

Change is dreaded by them.

They claim the right to be let alone.

They fear he will torment them."

Spurgeon. Sermon 'Resistance to Salvation' *Sermons on the Miracles*, The Kelvedon Edition

I wonder how the disciples felt as they saw Jesus engaging with this most fearful person, who would have given them the heeby jeebies with his terrible appearance. This is where we break off, but I encourage you to read and re-read this passage in the interim to see what you can bring to it.

Matt 8:29 ""What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?""

Somewhere the demon says this - have you come to destroy us before the time? A telling question to ask Jesus, which shows they know Jesus is the judge, and he has the role of destruction.